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Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 PM-09 NSC-10 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03 USIA-12 PRS-01 OMB-01

RSR-01 EUR-25 IO-12 DPW-01 AID-20 /136 W
---------- 027161
R 250953 Z APR 73
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 722
INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 7181

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT VS MILI
SUBJECT: GEN. TRAN VAN TRA: CAPTURED, OR JUST AWOL ?

REF: SAIGON 6936

1. A MISLEADING STORY CONCERNING THE WHEREABOUTS OF GEN. TRAN VAN TRA, CHIEF- DESIGNATE OF THE PRG DELEGATION TO THE TWO- PARTY JOINT MILITARY COMMISSION, HAS BEEN PICKED UP BY AP AND PERHAPS OTHER NEWS SERVICES. AP STORY DATED APRIL 24 STATES IN PART:
" SOUTH VIETNAM TOLD THE VIET CONG TUESDAY THAT VIET CONG ENVOY LT. GEN. TRAN VAN TRA IS UNDER ARREST IN HANOI AND PROPOSED THAT THE TWO SOUTH VIETNAMESE SIDES APPEAL JOINTLY TO NORTH VIETNAM TO RELEASE HIM... SAIGON MILITARY SPOKESMAN LT. COL. LE TRUNG HIEN GAVE NO DETAILS OF WHY TRA, THE VIET CONG' S CHIEF DELEGATE IN SOUTH VIETNAM, WAS ALLEGEDLY ARRESTED BUT SAID THAT TRA' S ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED VISIT TO NORTH VIETNAM WAS TO LAST ONE DAY AND THE GENERAL HAS NOW BEEN THERE 5."

2. EMBASSY HAS BEEN TRYING TO DETERMINE FACTS SINCE YESTERDAY AND BELIEVES FOLLOWING ACCOUNT ACCURATELY REFLECTS WHAT HAPPENED. DURING APRIL 24 MEETING OF TPJMC CHIEFS, RVN DELEGATE HIEP RESPONDED AT SOME LENGTH TO A PRG PROPOSAL TO A JOINT APPEAL TO BOTH SIDES TO STOP THE FIGHTING. HIEP' S RESPONSE WAS THAT THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS WAS FOR NVA TO GET ITS
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TROOPS OUT OF RVN SO THAT TWO SOUTH VIETNAMESE PARTIES COULD SETTLE THE CONFLICT; IT WAS, THEREFORE, TO THE DRV THAT THE FIRST JOINT APPEAL SHOULD BE MADE. IN COURSE OF DEBATE ON THIS POINT, HIEP NOTED AGAIN EXTENDED ABSENCE OF GEN. TRA AND SURMISED THAT SINCE HE HAD BEEN AWAY FROM SAIGON FOR 25 DAYS, IT MIGHT BE THAT HE WAS BEING HELD CAPTIVE IN HANOI; IF SO, THE DRV SHOULD RELEASE HIM SO THAT TWO- PARTY TALKS COULD PROCEED. HIEP' S COMMENT WAS MADE IN JUST AND APPARENTLY WAS SO INTERPRETED BY THE PRG AT THE TIME.

3. LATER IN THE DAY, LT. COL. HIEN, BRIEFING ON TPJMC AT 1630 PRESS CONFERENCE, LIFTED COMMENT FROM CONTEXT AND PLAYED IT AS STRAIGHT NEWS ITEM. HE THUS ENDOWED IT WITH IMPORTANCE AND SERIOUSNESS IT DID NOT MERIT. BOTH HIEN AND DELEGATION SOURCES SUBSEQUENTLY CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF THAT GVN HAD NO REASON TO ASSUME THAT TRA WAS BEING HELD IN HANOI OR ANYWHERE ELSE. DELEGATION SOURCE ADDED THAT THEY CURRENTLY HAVE NO RELIABLE INFORMATION AS TO HIS WHEREABOUTS, BUT SUGGESTED HANOI, COSVN HEADQUARTERS AREA, AND PARIS AS THREE GOOD POSSIBILITIES.
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